

It is not the plan of these expositions to go into great details concerning 'introductory' matters but a few comments may be made.

1. Historically reliable

1. **Mark's own way of presenting his material must be accepted; the four gospels are historically reliable.** This often affects interpretation. For example, Mark claims that the events of Mark 1:21–39 took place in a 24-hour period, but scholars often think that Mark has artificially compressed events and that it did not take place this way at all. However I take it that Mark's own presentation must be accepted. Often Mark 2:1–3:6 is thought to be an artificial collection of 'conflict stories', but if Mark 3:6 is telling the truth and there was a plot against Jesus' life, some events must have taken place which caused conflict. Why should 2:1–3:5 not be the accurate presentation of a series of events that actually took place and gave rise to what happened according to Mark 3:6? I follow the gospel-writers' own claims for their material.

2. Order is chronological

2. **I take it that Mark's Gospel is in chronological order.** Ancient writers were not so bothered about strictly chronological sequence as modern scholars, yet there is reason to believe that Mark generally tells events in sequence. It is only he who tells the events of a 24-hour period (in Mark 1:21–39) in chronological order. And if, as I believe, Mark 2:1–3:6 tells the story of rising opposition then the stories must either be in sequence or at least must be a string of incidents from the same time.

There is actually no point in Mark's Gospel which is **demonstrably** out of chronological sequence, apart from the obvious 'flashback' in 6:14–29.

3. Balanced structure

3. As for **the structure of Mark**, it may be said that it seems to have a balance in it and to focus on Mark 8:27–9:1.

A. Prologue (1:1–13)

B. Ministry based in Galilee (1:14–8:26)

1. The rise of opposition, in Capernaum (1:14–3:6)
2. The secret of the kingdom (3:7–6:6)
3. The highpoint of conflict in Galilee (6:7–7:23)
4. Avoiding Herod and the Pharisees (7:24–8:26)

C. The revelation of Jesus (8:27–9:1)

B. Travelling and ministering in Judea (9:2–15:47)

1. Preparing the disciples (9:2–10:52)
2. Fruitless Israel (11:1–19)
3. A Day of Questions (11:20–13:37)
4. Plot at Passover time (14:3–15:47)

A. Epilogue (16:1–8)

4. Traditional view of origin basically right

4. I take it that **the traditional view of the origin of Mark's gospel is basically right.**

The early church maintained that John Mark, the author, was Peter's 'interpreter' – that is, follower and expositor – and that this gospel originated in Rome. Irenaeus says that after Peter's 'exodus' Mark's Gospel was written. This could be at about AD 64 (after Peter's death) but if 'exodus' means departure from the city the date could be earlier.

Mark seems to have gone to Alexandria in the AD 50s. Perhaps Mark had already composed his gospel before AD 50.

5. Mark is the most "basic" of the Gospels

5. **Mark is the most 'basic' of the Gospels and its material is generally more 'primitive' than Matthew's Gospel.**

Scholars argue a lot about which gospel-writers borrowed material from

Gospel writers and the connection between the gospel material

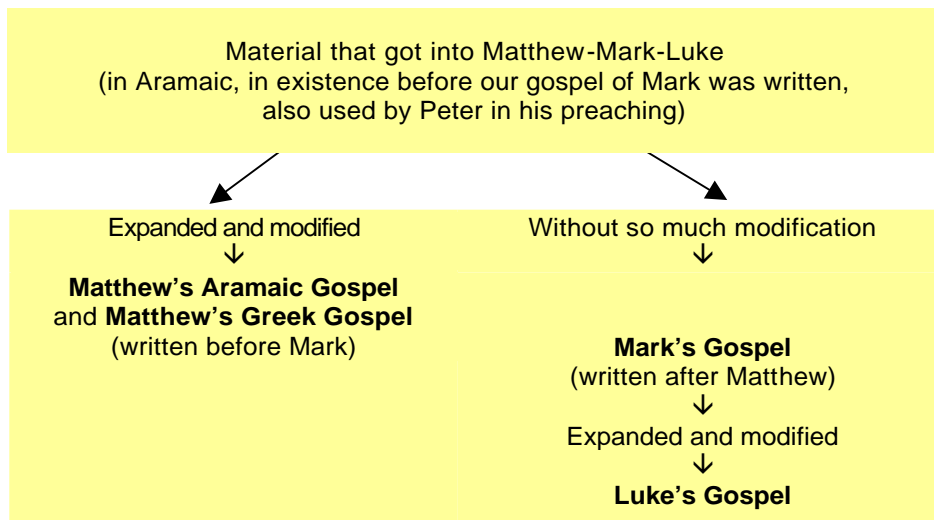
earlier gospels. Matthew and Mark certainly have common material. My own view is that the material is found in its earliest and simplest form in Mark's Gospel. Anyone who has worked through Matthew's Gospel and then through Mark's Gospel asking the question 'Has Mark reworked Matthew?' generally comes – I maintain – to the answer 'No!' It is different if the question is asked the other way round. Anyone who works through Mark's Gospel and then comes to Matthew's Gospel asking the question 'Has Matthew reworked Mark?' comes – I maintain – to the answer 'Maybe!' It is certainly more likely that way round. A study of the 'Rich Young Ruler' might make one think that Matthew has slightly changed Mark but it is not likely to make one think that Mark has changed Matthew (see Matthew 19:16–23; Mark 10:17–23). A study of the cursing of the fig-tree (Matthew 21:18–22; Mark 11:12–14) leads one to similar conclusions. Matthew's is more likely to be the 'revised' version and Mark's more likely to be the earlier one.

Early Christians insisted that Matthew's Gospel was written first

However I am not convinced that this is quite the right way to put it! I would rather put it like this. There can be no doubt in my mind that Mark's version is the older and Matthew has been 'angled' to emphasise some particular points – although I do not think Matthew has changed any basic facts. Yet the early Christians were quite insistent that Matthew's Gospel was written first and Mark's was written second – and I am inclined to believe them.

Mark's **material** is found in Matthew. If Mark wrote after Matthew he deliberately made a shortened version. It was shortened not by compressing (Mark usually tells stories more fully than Matthew!) but by leaving out certain material.

If Matthew wrote after Mark he incorporated Mark, slightly compressing the material, and added his own material. This view tends to make us neglect Mark. After all, if it was simply incorporated into Matthew why bother with Mark?



Matthew and Mark – the exact sequence complex

This seems to be the picture that emerges if one's study concentrates both on early Christian statements and on the gospels themselves. Mark's material is older and less modified than Matthew's, yet I do not think we can use this fact to argue that Matthew has directly modified Mark. Matthew is modifying Marcan material, but perhaps not Mark's Gospel itself. However it does not make much difference. Mark's Gospel certainly seems the most fundamental of the first three gospels and the other two seem to be expansions of its material. The exact sequence of how it happened we may perhaps never know. Obviously it was a very complex matter.

Luke and Mark

The church has inherited a fourfold gospel and each book must be considered distinctly and not only in the light of the others. I believe a preacher may take into account that Luke knew the material in Mark's Gospel, and he may take it that Matthew is familiar with an earlier version

of the same material that came into Mark's Gospel (which is more or less – but not quite – the same as saying that he was modifying Mark).

Mark gives the straight historical facts

The purpose of Matthew is more obvious than the purpose of Mark. Matthew is 'making a case' more conspicuously than Mark. Mark might also be 'making a case' but his handling of stories about Jesus is less theologically slanted than Matthew's. The old assumption that 'Mark gives us the historical facts about Jesus in as 'straight' a form as we are likely to get them' ¹ seems to me to be basically correct although it has been challenged a great deal since the days of William Wrede (that is, since 1901).



Mark has a great interest in sheer facts. This is why his purpose is more difficult to discern than Matthew's. He is concerned about the facts more than presenting them to make a special point. Although his gospel is shorter than the others, his stories are actually told in fuller detail.

Matthew's audience Jewish – Mark's audience mainly Gentile

Matthew's audience was Jewish, but Mark's audience was mainly Gentile. The early traditions of the Christian church say that Mark was Peter's 'interpreter' (expositor, disciple, colleague). This implies that Mark's Gospel was written for Christians at Rome, and what we know of the gospel fits in with this well. Mark explains things that Gentiles would find difficult. Matthew does not explain Jewish customs. Mark does.

Endnote

1 I quote from The Interpretation of Mark (ed. W. Telford, SPCK, 1985, p. 3), and allude to Wrede's Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien (1901).

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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